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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000903

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TAGS: [PARM](#) [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KCFE](#) [RU](#) [AM](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN IN WAIT AND SEE MODE REGARDING RUSSIAN
CFE SUSPENSION

REF: A. BAKU 00841

[1](#)B. MOSCOW 03451

[1](#)C. IIR 6 941 0073 07

[1](#)D. IIR 6 941 0074 07

[1](#)E. IIR 6 941 0089 07

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Local media reaction to Russia's announcement to suspend participation in the CFE Treaty has been largely muted, with most of the media organizations adopting a cautious approach to the development. Local political commentators are still digesting this development as well. Initial responses are largely guided by the individual commentator's respective understanding of the Treaty's conditions. Those less familiar with the Treaty's specifics are quick to criticize the Russian step, while at the same time faulting the CFE Treaty for being an ineffective impediment for stopping Russian military assistance to Armenia or stemming the flow of weaponry from Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh. Pundits with a deeper understanding of the Treaty's substance also generally hold a negative view of the Treaty because they believe it runs counter to Azerbaijan's interests vis-a-vis several of its key national security challenges: Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia, and Russia. Local analyst Ilgar Mammadaov's argument that the Russian decision could give the GOAJ the necessary political cover to seek its own adjustments to the Treaty tracks with our previous belief that the GOAJ is considering suspending its participation in the Treaty (ref A). The GOAJ likely will remain in a "wait-and-see" mode in the coming weeks as it gauges the U.S. and European response to the Russian step. We believe it would be useful to weigh in formally with the GOAJ with our views on this development and welcome Washington's continued guidance. End Summary.

Press Readout

[1](#)2. (SBU) Local media reaction to Russia's announcement has been largely muted, with most of the media organizations adopting a wait-and-see attitude to the development. Presidential advisor Novruz Mammadov told Interfax that Azerbaijan favors "constructive" relations between the U.S. and Russia, and that he viewed Putin's decision as counter to such relations. Reflecting the GOAJ's generally cautious policy stance, Mammadov noted that the GOAJ thought it was

"too soon" to comment substantively on the Russian step, and that the GOAJ was waiting to hear the reactions from the U.S. and Europe. Former presidential aide Vafa Quluzade told ANS-TV on July 15 that he does not think Azerbaijan will be affected by Russia's decision to suspend participation in the CFE Treaty. The pro-opposition Yeni Musavat newspaper ran a speculative July 16 article under the headline, "The New Cold War has Officially Begun."

Local Analysts See CFE as Unfair

13. (C) Political commentator Ilgar Mammadov told us the Russian decision opened up a new opportunity to advance Azerbaijan's regional interests that he hoped the GOAJ would pursue. Mammadov explained that because Russia has taken the first step of suspending participation in the Treaty regime, this can give Azerbaijan the political cover to raise its own concerns with what Mammadov regarded as an unjust and unfair treaty. Mammadov argued that the Treaty is against Azerbaijan's interests, mirroring what Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov told Charge on July 5 (ref A). Specifically, Mammadov said the Treaty unfairly sets equal arms ceilings on all three South Caucasus states when Azerbaijan is the largest both in terms of territory and population. Mammadov also commented that Russia and Armenia have broken the Treaty, and Azerbaijan's continued compliance with the Treaty only reinforces an already disadvantageous situation for Baku.

14. (C) Local civil society activist Dadash Alishov told us the Russian decision was primarily directed toward a U.S. and European audience. Alishov argued that the Russian decision

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would only have a limited practical impact on Azerbaijan because Russia and Armenia broke the Treaty while Azerbaijan committed itself to compliance with the agreement. Alishov's perspective is reflective of the broader societal view that sees Moscow and Yerevan as Baku's conspiring enemies, while at the same time having a limited understanding of the Treaty's details.

15. (C) Political pundit Rasim Musabeyov publicly said Russia's decision was not a surprise for anyone. Musabeyov commented that Russia has been increasing its troop strength in the North Caucasus. Reflecting a somewhat more optimistic tone than other commentators, Musabeyov said that because Armenia is a party to the Treaty, the Russian decision would not necessarily translate into a large increase of Russian armaments being sent to Armenia.

Comment

16. (C) As we suggested in ref A, we believe the GOAJ has been cautiously waiting for Russia to make the first moves on CFE. The GOAJ perceives that the Treaty is disadvantageous to its interests on several of Azerbaijan's top national security concerns: Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia, and Russia. While Russia has now taken the first step, we believe the GOAJ will remain in the "wait-and-see" mode for the coming weeks, as it watches for the U.S. and European reaction to Russia's decision. Novruz Mammadov's statement that the GOAJ is waiting to gauge the U.S. and European reaction to Russia's suspension of the Treaty is the most recent and clearest reflection of this policy.

17. (C) The U.S. interest in this Treaty as a cornerstone of stability in Europe is clear. The Ambassador will be meeting with senior officials -- including Foreign Minister Mammadyarov and Presidential Administration Chief of Staff Ramiz Mehdiyev -- today to caution Azerbaijan from taking any precipitous action in response to the Russian moratorium. We welcome guidance on our response to this development. We believe the nature of the U.S. and European response to

Russia's action will be critical to determining the GOAJ's next steps. Our key points of leverage with the GOAJ will be a strongly unified U.S.-European response to Russia's action as suggested ref B, and the GOAJ's broader desire to remain in good standing with the U.S. We note, however, that our overall leverage on this issue with the GOAJ is limited by the widespread public perception that the CFE Treaty disadvantages Azerbaijan and that a Russian withdrawal would reinforce this further as the GOAJ explained at the recent security dialogue.

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